

# Summary of Conditions and Issues

This section summarizes the major conditions and planning issues that were identified in the analyses of the various subjects.

Issues are defined as questions that should be discussed and debated during the comprehensive planning process and resolved in light of other issues.

Subsequent chapters of this plan present the analyses of conditions and a more detailed discussion of issues for each planning topic. This information will help citizens and officials understand these and other issues and how they are interrelated.

## Major Issues

These appear to be the most important planning questions facing Eau Claire:

1. **Fringe Growth Management:** What should the City do to ensure that urban expansion is compact, cost-efficient and designed for lasting value ?

*There has been an accelerating trend toward Eau Claire perimeter growth occurring in the Towns rather than the City on extra-large, unsewered lots that cannot easily be resubdivided into urban-sized properties and served with public sewer or water lines. Too often, there is insufficient planning for road extensions, parks, water towers and other essential urban infrastructure. Also, the pattern of perimeter land use sometimes reflects short-term decisions and sacrifices community development objectives. An important related issue is whether to continue to provide sanitary sewer service only to properties in the City of Eau Claire.*

2. **Neighborhood Stabilization and Improvement:** What should be the City's strategy for maintaining or improving the older parts of the community?

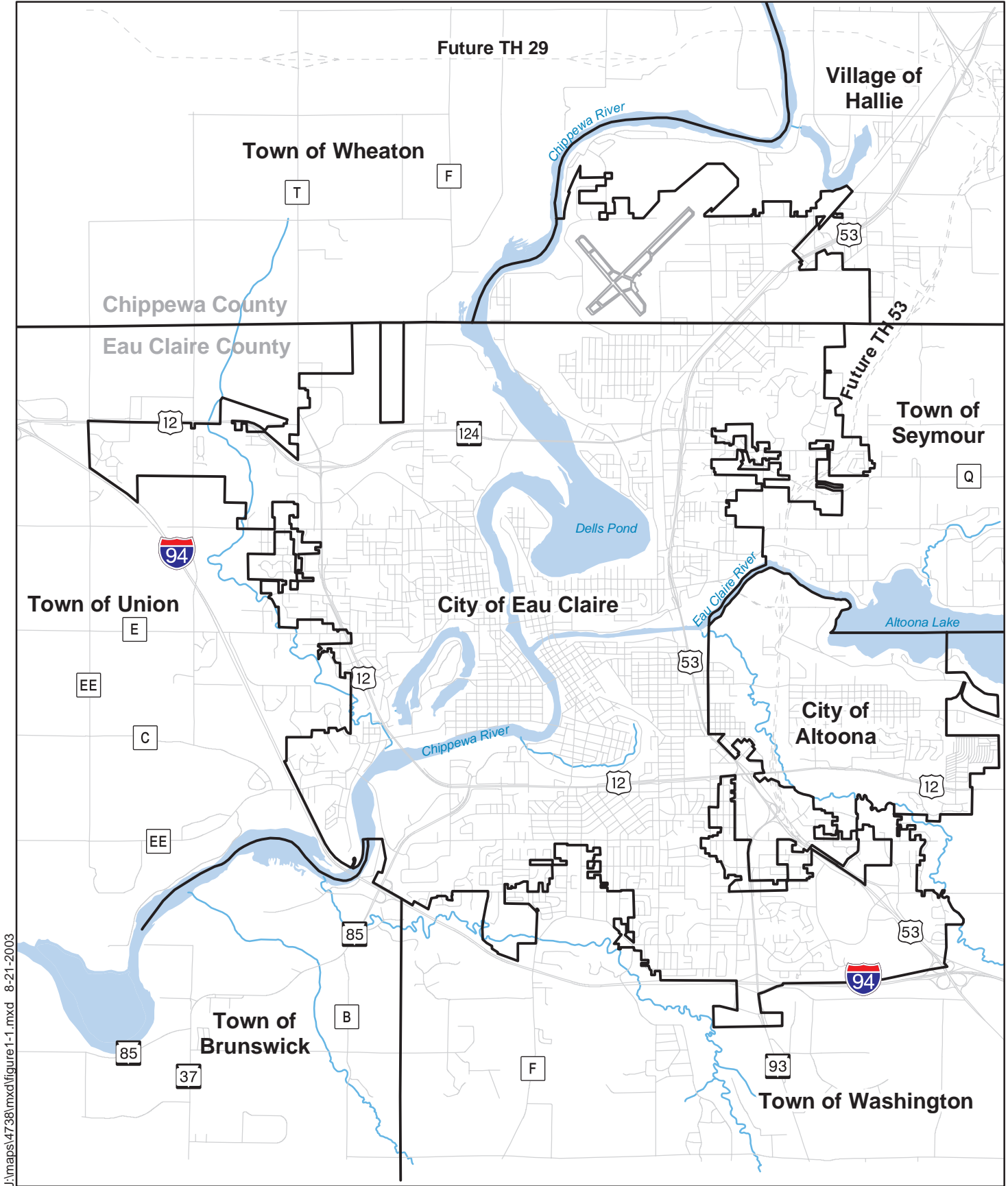
*As an older community, Eau Claire faces the challenge of keeping its residential, commercial and industrial districts attractive and competitive. Many changes in markets, technology and society have occurred that cause obsolescence and disinvestment. Furthermore, that cost of redevelopment is high and fringe sites offer less expensive land and fewer encumbrances. However, communities cannot afford to let older districts drift down ward because the public fiscal and social costs are too great. Continuous renewal offers the benefits of a sense of place, historic charm, tax base growth, environmental protection and travel cost savings, to mention a few.*

- 3. Economic Development:** What actions should the City take to promote and coordinate private investment in businesses, especially those that produce higher-wage jobs?

*Eau Claire is in the long process of reducing its dependence on manufacturing and increasing its strength in health care, education, retail sales, wholesale trade and professional services. Several private or public organizations coordinate their efforts to retain, grow or attract businesses by providing suitable locations or financing. The elements of this Comprehensive Plan also promote economic growth by helping to create an attractive and efficient place to live, work and play. The success of these and other efforts will be important to the quality of life of all residents.*



**The Chippewa River at the State Trail bridge.**



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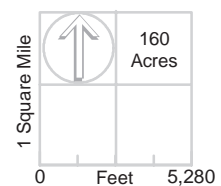


Figure 1-1

Regional Location

## Demographics

Over the past 20 to 30 years, Eau Claire has become more diverse facially and ethnically with large increases in Hmong and Hispanic members. The median age of the population has risen as the Baby Boom generation has aged and has been followed by a smaller cohort in the 25 to 34 age group. The average number of persons in a household has declined as the Baby Boomer have formed their own households and many young singles or childless couples have moved to Eau Claire for economic opportunities. However, median household income remains somewhat lower than comparably sized regional centers in Wisconsin. The adjacent townships have captured a growing portion of regional growth although the City's population is expected to continue to increase at a rate comparable to the past two decades.

1. **Income:** What, if anything, should the City do to raise the average household income of Eau Claire residents?
2. **Age Structure:** What, if anything, should the City do to attract and retain more people in the 25 to 34 year-old age group?
3. **Regional Growth:** What should the City do to capture a large share of regional growth?
4. **Household Size:** How should the land use plan be adjusted to accommodate the increasing number of small households?

## Land Use

Eau Claire has continued to grow in a pattern that resembles the trends of the past several decades. This includes new fringe neighborhoods composed mostly of detached housing but also including clusters of apartment buildings and townhouses. The major retail center is around Oakwood Mall in the southeast, and a major industrial center has emerged in the northwest near County Highway T and State Highway 124. The expansion of neighborhoods served by public sewer and water services has been encumbered in a few instances by large-lot, unsewered subdivisions in the adjacent townships. That problem could continue and increase in the future. The construction of a new US 53 could pull business and residential growth toward the northeastern part of the region.

1. **Regional Coordination of Growth:** Can the adjacent townships and village be persuaded to adopt a land use plan and zoning regulations that support efficient, cost-effective and compact urban expansion and disallow a pattern of small, unsewered semi-urban lots?
2. **Sanitary Sewer System Control:** Should the City of Eau Claire change its long-standing policy and allow extensions of sanitary sewer mains outside the City without annexation to the City?
3. **New Neighborhood Design :** Should the City require that new residential areas be designed with many of the features of the older neighborhoods such as sidewalks,

street trees, a mixture of housing types, a mixed-use core, narrow streets, short front setbacks and garages located to the rear?

## Natural Resources

1. **River and Creek Shoreline Land Use:** What is the most appropriate pattern of land use along the rivers and creeks?
2. **Public Access to Rivers and Creeks:** Where, if anywhere, should additional public access to the rivers and creeks be created?
3. **Steep Slopes:** Should the City adopt its own development regulations for steep slopes that supercede the slope controls that are mandated by the *Urban Sewer Service Area Plan*?

## Transportation

The transportation system in and around Eau Claire is focused on the road network .....

1. **Strategic Improvements for Growth Management:** What road improvements should be made to promote annexation and guide growth?
2. **New US 53:** How is the City going to incorporate the major changes brought about by the new US 53 alignment?
3. **Road Extensions and Connectivity:** Is there a need for future road extensions and river crossings?
4. **Sidewalk Requirements:** Should the City continue to require sidewalks on both sides of new streets?

## Parks and Greenways

1. **The Number of Full-Service Playgrounds:** In order to save money, should the City reduce the number of Playgrounds at which it provides a full complement of facilities and programs?
2. **New Neighborhood Parks:** Should the City continue with the practice of creating a 5- to 10-acre Playground in each new neighborhood (about 4,000 residents), or should there be fewer but larger Playgrounds?
3. **Riverfront Parks:** How aggressive should the City be in acquiring land and/or easements to extend the park system along the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers? To what extent should the City strive to provide or require public access to the riverfront during property redevelopment? What should be the balance between public access and private control?
4. **Balance of Park Size and Type in All Areas of the City:** Should newly developed areas have the same number and distribution of small neighborhood parks as older Eau Claire neighborhood? What should the City do, if anything, to ensure that residents of older neighborhoods have the same access to large athletic fields as do the residents of new neighborhoods, and that newer neighborhoods have easy walking access to visually attractive parks?

## Community Visual Character

1. **Development Model:** Which development model is preferred: the traditional neighborhood with its emphasis on the street, sidewalk and front yard, or the more low density “suburban” look? Does Eau Claire wish to design its zoning regulations to promote one or the other, or leave it to the market to decide?
2. **Mixture of Housing Types:** In what instances, if any, would it be appropriate to introduce multiple-family housing into single-family neighborhoods? What conditions should be applied in such instances?
3. **Mixed-Use Development:** Where might it be appropriate to mix residential with non-residential land uses? When might they be mixed vertically (housing above business) or horizontally (housing next to commercial space)?
4. **Design Guidelines and Design Review:** Although the site planning and landscaping regulations in the zoning ordinance were improved since the last plan, should they be made more rigorous?
5. **Guidelines for Site Planning:** Should the *Multi-Family Housing Design Manual* (1998) be strengthened and made mandatory by incorporating those guidelines as requirements in the zoning ordinance?

# Economic Development

Economic development issues will be submitted in November.

## Public Utilities

Coordination of fringe growth is the key issue of this comprehensive plan. Some key opportunities for utilities system growth have been foreclosed or made more expensive by lack of an agreed regional plan. Utility expansion problems raise public costs and make the entire region less competitive.

1. **Sanitary Sewer System Control:** Should the City of Eau Claire change its long-standing policy and allow extensions of sanitary sewer mains outside the City without annexation to the City?

In which locations, if any, should the Regional Planning Commission be requested to expand or contract the Sewer Service Area?

*While this plan was being prepared, landowners in the newly-formed Village of Lake Hallie were seeking approval from the City to have a sanitary sewer main extended along Hastings Way to serve their commercial properties. As with the problem of semi-urban perimeter lots, sewer service without annexation would result in financial costs to the City, loss of City property tax base, loss of control over growth management, uncompensated use of City facilities and services, and increased loss of allegiance to the central city and its challenges.*

2. **Regional Planning:** Can Eau Claire and its township neighborhoods agree on a pattern of future land use, annexation staging and utilities service (including locations for major facilities such as water towers)?

## Community Facilities

1. **New Public Safety Facility:** Where should a new public safety facility be located to best service the growth and development of the community?
2. **Emergency Services:** What limits (if any) exist with Fire and Police service on the City's growth and development in terms of direction of area? Darryl: this is not a debatable issue, but it is something that you should try to address in the analysis by talking with the Chiefs.
3. **School-Park Concept:** Should the community continue to support a combined elementary school / neighborhood park concept?
4. **Growth Relative to School Capacity:** Should the City direct growth into areas where school attendance capacity is available?

5. **Future School Sites:** To what extent should the City and the School District attempt to coordinate future school site location needs based on growth management goals?
6. **Retired Schools:** How should schools that are closed be reused within a neighborhood?
7. **Community Center:** Should the City build a community center that includes an indoor aquatic center, gymnasiums, meeting rooms, etc., and where should it be built.
8. **Convention Center:** Should the City and/or the County build a major conference or convention center, and where?

## Housing Analysis

1. **Rental Housing Supply:** What should the City do, if anything, to increase the supply of lower-cost rental housing, especially with more than two bedrooms?
2. **Diversity and Design:** To what degree is a diversity of housing types desirable within single neighborhoods? Could design standards help to create a compatible mixture of housing types and densities? Should the greatest variety of housing types be concentrated around commercial nodes?
3. **“Upper-Bracket” Housing:** Should the City make special efforts to attract new housing with sale prices over \$200,000?
4. **Infill Standards:** Should design standards be developed for new infill housing in existing older neighborhoods? These might include basic criteria such as similar setbacks, building massing and garage placement.
5. **Preservation of Existing Housing:** How can the city’s existing housing stock best be preserved and upgraded? Are additional incentives needed to stimulate private sector investment in housing in the city’s older neighborhoods?
7. **Zoning Flexibility:** Should the city’s zoning code be made more flexible to accommodate a greater variety of housing types and site designs?

## Historic Resources

1. **Protection:** Are the City’s historic resources adequately protected?
2. **Coordination:** How can the Landmarks Commission, Historic Preservation Foundation, Chippewa Valley Museum and other organizations better coordinate efforts to promote and educate the community about historic preservation?
3. **Preservation Incentives:** What additional incentives should be made available to encourage the preservation and restoration of significant buildings and should such incentives be made available to older “non-significant” buildings?



4. **Opted-Out Properties:** How should the current status of the districts and individual properties be addressed that opted out of their designation in 1992?
6. **Honorary Local Designation:** Should a local designation level be provided that establishes more of an honorary designation having fewer restrictions?

## Downtown

1. **City Support:** What degree of financial and other support will the City be willing to provide for Downtown redevelopment?
2. **Institutional Master Plans:** What geographic limits should be planned for the County government center and the medical center in order to protect the quality of nearby residential neighborhoods?
3. **Riverfront Land Use in the Northwest Quadrant:** How should the riverfront property north of Madison Street and east of Bellinger-First Streets be planned? Should this area include a linear public park as part of a longer west bank greenway?
4. **One-Way Streets:** Should the Barstow and Graham one-way pair be converted to two-way traffic?
5. **Public Access to the Riverfront:** To what extent should there be public access to the riverfront in Downtown? Should such access be provided strictly through public parks or should there be a combination of parks and easements across private property?
6. **Design Requirements:** Should the City promote and enforce design guidelines for facades, signs, parking?

## Intergovernmental Coordination

Intergovernmental Coordination issues will be completed during October.